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The Greatest Book In The World

Delivered by invitation before
The Charleston, S. C. Bible Society
and before
The Synod of S. C.

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ANNUAL ADDRESS

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THE GREATEST BOOK IN THE WORLD

When Sir Walter Scott lay on his death bed he said to his son-in-law: "Bring me the Book". Greatly puzzled, Lockhart asked "What book will you have"? Turning wearily upon his pillow the dying man made answer: "Can you ask what book? There is but One."

This man was himself the author of perhaps two-score volumes—some of which will, I trust, endure as long as our English tongue is spoken, but it was not to these he turned for solace in that supreme hour. Nor was it to poet, historian, or philosopher, all of whom in life he had loved, that he looked for comradeship when heart and flesh were failing. But he turned to the One Book of which the Psalmist wrote some thirty centuries before: It is "more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb."

For the Bible is easily the greatest Book in the world:

1. Because it is read by more people than any other book.

The pagan religions number their followers by the tens of millions, but they have very few books, and these are accessible only to the elect few. To the multitudes these sacred books are a veritable terra incognita—a country unknown. But in protestant lands just the reverse is true. Here the Bible is open to all and whosoever will may read. The aim of the churches, and of the Bible agencies, is not merely to put a copy of The Book in every home, but into every hand, and so write its golden message indelibly upon every heart—for "the entrance of Thy Word giveth light".

The ignorant and the infidel—those who do not know and those who refuse to know the truth—are fond of telling us that the Bible has lost its hold, and is a vanishing Book. Voltaire declared that in a hundred years it would be utterly forgotten; that some "Old Mortality" searching among the dust-covered shelves of some ancient library would come upon a

worn and mouldy volume bearing the title: "The Bible", and would wonder what it is. Voltaire has been dead nearly one hundred and sixty years, but the Word of the Lord liveth and abideth forever.

Thomas Paine was even more bold in proclaiming this an exploded Book. He would be like a woodsman with sharpened axe entering the woodland, and laying the axe at the root of some mighty giant of the forest. So would he cut down this so-called "tree of life"; and so completely that even the priests of the religion could not make it grow again. Paine died more than a century and a quarter ago, and few there are who know that he even lived. But the tree of life blooms immortal beside the crystal stream, and its leaves are being scattered more widely each year "for the healing of the nations".

Ingersoll, whom the world lightly called "Bob", fifty years ago proclaimed the Bible a thoroughly discredited book, whose sales would fall off rapidly, and in ten years would be little read. He further prophesied that in a few years more theatres would be builded in America than churches.

These prophets of evil are long dead and well-nigh forgotten. The funeral orations which they so kindly uttered were just a bit premature, for The Book still lives and goes steadily forward on its conquering way.

Before the depression began Methodist Churches alone were being completed, or completely renovated, at the rate of one every six hours of the working day. If you add to this Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran and a score of other denominations, new church buildings or buildings made new, must have come into existence at the rate of one every hour, or less, of each working day. Amazing activity for an organization whose charter is "dead", "forgotten", "exploded".

Since Ingersoll's prophecy was uttered six new publishing houses, devoted to the printing of Bibles alone, have been established. These, with already existing Bible agencies throughout the world, published last year more than thirty million copies of Bibles, testaments, and portions. This means a hundred thousand copies during every eight hour day or two hundred and eight every minute. In other words Bibles, or portions, are falling from the presses of the earth

more rapidly than words fall from a speaker's lips. For an "exploded book" this is doing reasonably well!

Selfridge & Company, a London department store, sold 10,000 copies of a beautifully bound Bible in six weeks. The demand increased so that the store gave an order for 100,000 copies, the biggest single order, we are told, ever placed. The manager of the store is quoted as writing to the printers: "There is only one book in the world of which any business firm would dare order 100,000 copies."

Take for further illustration the Oxford Presses of Oxford, England. They publish only the costlier type of books —leather bound, gilt edged, and on finest grades of India paper. The Oxford output runs to over a million copies a year, and it requires the skins of a hundred thousand animals each year to furnish leather bindings, and four hundred thousand sheets of gold to gild the leaves, and provide lettering for the product of the Oxford presses alone.

When the Revised Version came from the press less than fifty years ago, three million copies were sold in a few days. This has been rightly pronounced "The most stupendous literary fact in the history of the world".

Surely, then, a book whose earliest chapters were written full thirty-three centuries ago; the ink on the parchment to which its last chapters were committed dried well over eighteen centuries ago; and which is sold by the tens of millions of copies each year, and those sales steadily mounting, is beyond challenge the "Greatest Book in the world".

Further, the Bible deserves this title because:

II. It is printed in more languages than any other book.

Four hundred years ago the first English edition came from the press. When that epoch-making event took place the book could be read in probably less than a dozen languages. In this day of printer's ink we say of the few books that have had as many as a hundred thousand copies issued that they have enjoyed amazing popularity. If translated into a half-dozen languages we say a book has had "a marvelous run".

The only volume that the writer recalls, at the moment, as having been translated into twenty languages is a very small book that contains the very "marrow and fatness" of the gospel message.

But here is a Book that has been translated not into a mere score of tongues, but into nine hundred and seventy-two of the languages and dialects of the earth. The great company of those who believe in it is steadily widening. Its readers circle the globe. The sphere of its influence is constantly enlarging—nine hundred and seventy-two translations and a new translation is added about every five weeks.

Daniel Webster stood one morning at sunrise on the ramparts at Quebec. He heard the stirring roll of the drum as it called the garrison to the tasks of the day, and then remarked, "The roll of Britain's drum never ceases". In imagination he followed its echo to Montreal, to Toronto, to the shores of the Pacific; he followed it as it leaped the ocean and echoed back from Australia and New Zealand; from Hongkong, India, Egypt, Malta and Gibraltar; from the shores of mighty Albion itself, and then crossing the Atlantic to the granite cliffs of Newfoundland it re-echoed once more from the ramparts of Quebec. Yes, "The roll of Britain's drum never ceases". With far more truth it may be said that the mighty voice of God in His glorious Word is never silent. With clear and resonant note it sounds over hill and valley, over mountain and plain, and echoes far across the seven seas, calling men in every land and every clime to repent, and believe and live.

As the stars in their courses look down upon this sin-wrecked earth, they see nine hundred and seventy-two nations and kindreds and peoples, each reading in his native tongue the wonderful works, and the sublime words of Almighty God. Surely, this is easily the Greatest Book in the world.

It is greatest, again, because:

III. Its influence on Individuals, on Literature, and on Nations is greater than that of all other books combined.

(a) As to Individuals:

Samuel Sloan, long president of the D. L. & W. Railroad, declared: "The Bible has lost none of its helpfulness in the on-rolling of centuries. It still remains the best chart by which our feet are guided."

William E. Gladstone, England's grand old man, said: "During my long public career I have known seventy men of

extraordinary ability. Sixty-five of them were devout Believers—reading and loving the Book of Books". And added: "All I write, all I think, all I hope, is based upon the Deity of our Lord, the one central hope of our poor wayward race."

Woodrow Wilson said: "I am sorry for the man who does not read his Bible every day". When he moved from the White House into his own modest residence he carried with him as a prized possession a much worn Bible. He kept it near at hand, and when unable to get out of bed, each morning he called his household about him and led them in family worship. Yes, I pity the man who forfeits the joy and uplift of reading his Bible every day.

I came upon this clipping the other day from the Archbishop of Canterbury: "King George read his Bible every day, prayed every day, and unless prevented by illness was always in his place at The House of God"—hence his fruitful reign, and the universal love of his subjects.

John Randolph of Roanoke, marvelously brilliant but very eccentric, declared: "I was an honest infidel. A group of us laughed quietly at those who still clung to these outworn superstitions. But I was not satisfied. I bought these books against the Bible and these others in its defence, and the Bible itself. Long and laboriously I studied them and studied it. From that study I rose with this irresistible conviction: "The Bible is true. It would have been as easy for moles to have written Sir Isaac Newton's Treatise on Optics as for uninspired men to have written the Bible."

To a kinsman in great sorrow he wrote: "Have you read The Book . . . I know it is true that the Bible studied with an humble and contrite heart never failed to do its work." And then he added, "I would not give my little portion in the Sacrifice offered on Calvary for all the glory and power of the Roman and Parthian empires. No, not for all that with which the enemy tempted the Savior of Man".

Gen. Robert E. Lee, acknowledging the gift of a Bible from friends and admirers in Britain, said: "It is a Book, in comparison with which in my eyes all others are of minor importance, and which in all my perplexities, has never failed to give me light and strength".

Blind Helen Keller says: "The Bible seems to me like a *river of light,* flowing through *my darkness.* It has kept my hope of accomplishment bright, when things seemed too difficult to overcome. Forty years long I have loved the Word of God. I feel the blessed pages under my hand with special thankfulness, as a rod and a staff to keep firm my steps through the valley of the shadow of the depression and world calamity. Truly, the Bible, the teaching of our Saviour, is *the only way out of the dark.*"

Thomas Henry Huxley, avowed agnostic, said: "The Bible has woven itself into all that is best and noblest in the literature and history of our English speaking race . . . I am utterly at a loss to know how the religious feeling, which is the basis of all right conduct, can be maintained without the Bible". This goes the limit for an agnostic.

And David, the sweet singer of Israel, voices the conviction of every believer: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path"—"Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law."

(b) As to Literature:

Probably the two greatest very extended poems of the last seven hundred years are Milton's "Paradise Lost" and Dante's "Inferno". Both are saturated with Bible teaching, and neither would have been possible without The Bible.

Dr. Henry Van Dyke counted more than four hundred references to the Bible in the poems of Tennyson. In Longfellow there are well over three hundred. In a single poem of Browning he counted one hundred and thirty scriptural allusions. Coleridge says: "To give the history of the Bible as a Book would be little else than to relate the origin of all the literature we possess. From this storehouse of literary materials our leading writers have most freely drawn".

A leading secular Journal declares: "It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the Bible as a promotive influence in English literature". A distinguished Roman Catholic writes: "The English Bible is God's greatest gift to the millions of Britain and America. It lives on the ear like music that can never be forgotten, like the sound of church bells which the convert hardly knows how to forego. It is part of the national mind."

Webster said: "If there is aught of eloquence in me, it is because I learned the scripture at my mother's knee."

Charles Dudley Warner says in effect "The Bible is the one Book no intelligent man can afford to be without." President Schurman (Cornell) declares: "The Bible is the most important document in the world's history. No man can be accounted uneducated who really knows the Bible, nor can any one be considered a truly educated man who is ignorant of it."

(c) Turning from the man to the multitude, from the individual to the nation, we find the same thing to be true. The influence of the Book is rich, marvelous, far-reaching, and profound.

The late Dr. Charles Alphonso Smith, brilliant professor of English at Annapolis, said of the Bible: "The most advanced nations of the earth are the children of her fireside. The very centuries themselves are but handmaidens in her service. There is no regnant people whose strivings she has not shepherded".

Andrew Jackson: "The Bible is the rock on which this Republic rests". U. S. Grant: "It is the sheet-anchor of our liberties".

George Washington: "It is impossible to govern a nation wisely without the Bible". Horace Greeley: "It is impossible to enslave intellectually, or socially, a Bible-reading people".

Nations may be classified by their attitude toward the Bible. Cast your eye over the map of the world, and you will find that the nations fall into three general groups:

(1) The Stagnant Nations, (2) the Retrogressive Nations, and (3) the Progressive Nations.

Of stagnant nations China is the most conspicuous example. A mighty giant, asleep for long centuries, learning nothing, forgetting nothing, and doing nothing, it felt at last the quickening touch of the Bible, with its message of life and love, and the giant began to move. Japan was for centuries asleep. Its gates were barred and bolted. None went in and none came out upon pain of death. Its life was utterly stagnant, until the Missionary came with the open Bible in his hand, and the love of Christ in his heart, and

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knocked at her fast-closed gates. Gradually they opened wide, and the Gospel is slowly leavening that still pagan land.

Of the retrogressive nations, Spain is the outstanding example. Once the most powerful nation in all Europe, feared and respected of all, she began burning the Bible in the market places, and with revolting cruelty destroying its devotees, and now none is so poor as to do her reverence. North Africa is a further example. Once the abode of culture and prosperity and power. Some of our greatest Christian leaders of the early centuries were natives of North Africa. But when she exchanged her Bible for the Koran her greatness swiftly waned, and today she is largely a desert waste where wandering Bedouins roam.

Among the progressive nations Britain and America stand out most prominently. First in power and prestige, first in enlightenment and wealth, and all that makes life worth the living. At one of her great anniversaries a Hindu Prince came to pay homage to his Queen. Seated one day in the royal palace at London he asked "what is the secret of your Country's greatness?" Queen Victoria lifted a leather bound volume from the table at her side and made answer, "This is the secret of my country's greatness". It was a copy of the Bible.

Wendell Phillips once declared: "The answer to the Koran is Turkey; the answer to the shasters is India; the answer to Confucianism is China; the answer to the Bible is the Christian civilization of Great Britain and America".

This is the Book that has seen the star of Empire rise and set, has watched Kingdom after Kingdom wax and wane, but has itself gone steadily on its victorious way conquering and to conquer. With Robert Burns we can well say this is indeed "a glorious Book".

But we have reserved the best for the last and will state it briefly.

IV. The Bible is the greatest Book in the world because it is the ultimate source of all our knowledge of Jesus Christ—the Son of God and the Saviour of the World.

If toward the close of the 1st Century every manuscript of the Bible had been destroyed, that would have been a calam-

ity too vast and terrible to be adequately measured in words, a calamity far greater than would be a permanent eclipse of the sun, for moral and spiritual values are immeasurably greater than those that are physical and material. But blessed be God, He who gave the Book has also preserved it through all the changes and disasters that have marked the centuries.

From these priceless pages we learn *that* Jesus was. We learn also *who and what* he was in all the radiant beauty of his character and his work.

On these pages we find traced in lines of living, loving, lasting light a face more marred than any man and a form more than the sons of men. Yet withal the face of him who is "the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person".

Across the stage of history we see moving with stately tread the majestic figure of Him who is the King "eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God", "Chiefest among ten thousand, the One altogether lovely". The figure of Him who "died for our sins and rose again for our justification".

"We search the world for truth; we cull
The good, the pure, the beautiful,
From graven stone and written scroll,
And all old flower fields of the soul;
And weary seekers of the best,
We come back laden from the Quest,
To find that all the Sages said
Is in the Book our Mothers read".

That book our mothers read and loved, should be read and reverenced by their children's children to the latest generation. It is God's Book. Its price is far above rubies. "More to be desired than gold, yea than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, even the drippings of the honeycomb".

Surely this is easily the Greatest Book in all the world.